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FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9731  
AMEMBASSY AMMAN PRIORITY  
AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI PRIORITY  
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS PRIORITY  
AMEMBASSY DOHA PRIORITY  
AMCONSUL DHAHRAN PRIORITY  
AMCONSUL JEDDAH PRIORITY  
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT PRIORITY  
AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY  
AMEMBASSY MANAMA PRIORITY  
AMEMBASSY MUSCAT PRIORITY  
AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY  
AMEMBASSY RIYADH PRIORITY  
AMEMBASSY SANAA PRIORITY  
AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY  
INFO AMEMBASSY CAIRO  
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 3988

FOR MANAMA POLITICAL OFFICERS' MEETING  
NEW DELHI FOR ASSISTANT SECRETARY MURPHY  
LONDON FOR RAPHEL  
PARIS FOR WINN

E.O. 12356: DECL:OADR

TAGS: [MOPS](#) [PREL](#) [IZ](#) [IR](#) [XF](#)

SUBJECT: THE GULF WAR: PROSPECTS FOR PEACE OR EXPANSION

REF: STATE 323960

[1](#)1. SECRET - ENTIRE TEXT.

[1](#)2. SUMMARY: THE GULF WAR WILL LIKELY BUT NOT NECESSARILY REMAIN STALEMATED. IRAQ DOMINATES IN EVERY MAJOR WEAPONS CATEGORY AND HAS CONSTRUCTED FORMIDABLE DEFENSES. YET, ALL IS NOT WELL. THE IRANIANS CONTINUE TO MAKE INROADS EVEN WHILE PAYING DEARLY FOR THEM. OVER TIME THE WILL OF IRAQI FORCES TO RESIST COULD BECOME INCREASINGLY BRITTLE. THE STAKES INVOLVED FOR WESTERN INTERESTS ARE TOO VITAL TO PERMIT COMPLACENCY. AN IRANIAN VICTORY WOULD REDRAW THE POLITICAL AS WELL AS THE GEOGRAPHIC MAP. THE DANGER IS NOT THAT IRAQ'S ACTIONS WILL SPARK A WIDER WAR BUT THAT IT WILL OVERESTIMATE ITS ABILITIES TO SUSTAIN A DETERMINED DEFENSE. IN ANY CASE, IRAN WILL NOT NOW ATTEMPT A FRONTAL ASSAULT ON OTHER GULF ARAB STATES BUT WILL CONTINUE TO PURSUE POLICIES DESIGNED TO DESTABILIZE THEIR RULING REGIMES OR AT MINIMUM INTIMIDATE THEM INTO STRICT NEUTRALITY. FINALLY, FEARS THAT THE SOVIETS WILL GAIN ADVANTAGES IN IRAN AT OUR EXPENSE ARE GROSSLY EXAGGERATED GIVEN THE DIVERGENT POLICIES OF THE TWO STATES AND THEIR ANTITHETICAL INTERESTS. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)3. THE IRAN-IRAQ WAR HAS ESSENTIALLY BEEN A BLOODY STALEMATE FOR THE LAST THREE AND ONE-HALF YEARS WITH IRANIAN SOLDIERS PAYING A TERRIBLE PRICE TO ACHIEVE MINOR TACTICAL GAINS. GIVEN IRAN'S GROSS INFERIORITY IN THE FULL RANGE OF MODERN WEAPONRY AND IRAQ'S FORMIDABLE, IF LARGELY STATIC, DEFENSIVE LINES, THE STALEMATE SHOULD CONTINUE. HOWEVER, WARS ARE NOT ENTIRELY PREDICTABLE. INDIVIDUAL MOTIVATION AND UNIT ESPIRIT STILL COUNT FOR A GREAT DEAL. IN THESE CATEGORIES, IRAN'S REVOLUTIONARY GUARDS AND RAG-TAG BASIJ CLEARLY HOLD SWAY. MOREOVER, THE IRAQI POLITICAL LEADERSHIP'S DETERMINATION TO MINIMIZE CASUALTIES AND TO USE ITS VAST AIR SUPERIORITY SPARINGLY LEAVE THE INITIATIVE TO IRAN'S FORCES -- A SITUATION THAT CERTAINLY MUST DEMORALIZE AT LEAST SOME OF THE MORE PROFESSIONAL OFFICERS AND NON-COMS IN IRAQ'S ARMY. EVEN MORE PUZZLING IS THE IRAQI ARMED FORCES' APPARENT WILLINGNESS TO ALLOW THEIR ADVERSARIES TO BUILD CAUSEWAYS AND PONTOON BRIDGES THROUGHOUT THE VAST HUWAYZAH MARSHES WITH ONLY SPORADIC HARRASSMENT FROM H&I FIRE OR AIR STRIKES. MILITARY ATTACHES AND ADVISERS IN BAGHDAD ARE AT A LOSS TO EXPLAIN IRAQ'S PASSIVITY AND VIOLATION OF SOME BASIC RULES OF WARFARE.

[1](#)4. NEVERTHELESS, THOSE WHO MEET WITH IRAQI COMMANDERS AND MILITARY INTELLIGENCE OFFICIALS FIND THEM EXUDING CONFIDENCE. AND, PERHAPS, NOT WITHOUT REASON. MASSIVE IRANIAN OFFENSIVES HAVE BEEN BROKEN TIME AND TIME AGAIN. WHERE IRAQI LINES HAVE BEEN BREACHED, THE

IRANIANS HAVE BEEN UNABLE TO EXPLOIT IT BECAUSE OF INADEQUACIES IN PLANNING, MOBILITY, AIR, ARMOR AND ARTILLERY SUPPORT AND LOGISTICS. INDEED, THESE FACTORS RATHER THAN IRAQI PROWESS MAKE A CONTINUED STALEMATE LIKELY.

15. TO CONTEMPLATE AN IRANIAN VICTORY REQUIRES THE SUPPOSITION THAT IRAQI FORCES AFTER SUFFERING A MAJOR, BUT INDECISIVE, BATTLEFIELD REVERSE, PANIC AND A GENERAL ROUT BEGINS SOMEWHAT ON THE ORDER OF WHAT HAPPENED TO ARVN TROOPS IN 1975. ALTHOUGH THE IRAQI LEADERSHIP WITH GOOD INTERIOR LINES OF DEFENSE COULD BE EXPECTED TO RUSH IN FRESH TROOPS TO CONTAIN THE DAMAGE, THE FACT IS THAT FEW FOREIGNERS HAVE ANY REAL KNOWLEDGE OF HOW IRAQI TROOPS WOULD HANDLE SUCH A REVERSE. WE BELIEVE THAT WHILE A COLLAPSE CANNOT BE RULED OUT, IT REMAINS IMPROBABLE FOR THE NEAR-TERM.

16. YET, THE STAKES IN THIS WAR ARE SUCH THAT WESTERN COUNTRIES SHOULD GUARD AGAINST COMPLACENCY. EVEN IF ONE ASSIGNS THE IRANIANS ONLY A 10-15 PERCENT POSSIBILITY OF VICTORY, THE IMPLICATIONS OF SUCH AN OUTCOME WOULD CERTAINLY BE CATASTROPHIC.

17. FEW DOUBT THAT KHOMEINI WANTS HIS INTERPRETATION OF ISLAM TO PREVAIL THROUGHOUT THE REGION OR THAT HE WOULD BE SATISFIED TO DOMINATE IRAQ. EVEN NOW THE IRANIANS ARE SEEKING TO UNDERMINE SEVERAL GULF REGIMES, MOST NOTABLY IN BAHRAIN AND KUWAIT. THE SAUDI RULING FAMILY IS THE OBJECT OF SCORN IN TEHRAN AND THEIR RIGHT TO ACT AS SOLE GUARDIANS OF THE HOLY PLACES HAS BEEN CALLED INTO QUESTION. IRANIAN FEELINGS TOWARD KING HUSSEIN AS A CRONY OF THE SHAH AND MORE RECENTLY AS AN ALLY OF IRAQ HARDLY NEED MENTIONING. DESPITE REPORTED ISRAELI AID FOR IRAN EARLIER IN THE WAR AND THEIR MUTUAL ANTI-PATHY FOR IRAQ, ISRAEL AND ITS RULE OVER JERUSALEM SERVE AS POWERFUL SYMBOLS THROUGH WHICH IRANIAN PROPAGANDA TRIES TO ROUSE ARAB AND NON-ARAB MUSLIMS ALIKE. THE ACTIONS OF IRANIAN-SUPPORTED GROUPS IN LEBANON SUCH AS HIZBALLAH AND ISLAMIC AMAL WOULD SEEM TO INDICATE THAT IRANIAN VITUPERATION DIRECTED AT ISRAEL IS MORE THAN RHETORICAL.

18. EVEN A VICTORIOUS IRAN WITH LESSER AMBITIONS AT MINIMUM COULD EXPECT TO DOMINATE OIL POLICY IN THE REGION AND FORCE A CHOICE AMONG GULF RULERS BETWEEN DISTANCING THEMSELVES FROM THE U.S. OR EMBRACING US AS NEVER BEFORE. BOTH SCENARIOS ARE INHERENTLY DANGEROUS AND UNSTABLE.

19. IF THIS ANALYSIS IS VALID, THEN IRAQ NEEDS BOLSTERING AND FEARS THAT ITS ACTIONS AGAINST KHARG OR IRAN'S INTERIOR WOULD SPREAD THE WAR, WHILE UNDERSTANDABLE, SHOULD BE SUBORDINATED TO REDUCING FURTHER THE ODDS THAT IT MIGHT LOSE. IN TRUTH IRAQ WAS TOO BOLD IN STARTING THIS WAR AND IS TOO TIMID IN PROSECUTING IT.

110. THE LONGER THE WAR DRAGS ON, THE MORE LIKELY AN IRAQI COLLAPSE BECOMES. A KHOMEINI-LED IRAN WILL NOT WIND DOWN OR END THE WAR UNLESS NO OTHER VIABLE OPTION EXISTS. THIS REQUIRES IRAN BE DENIED TO THE EXTENT POSSIBLE INCOME AND ARMS. THE IRANIANS ARE NOT GOING TO SPREAD THE WAR BY MAKING A SUSTAINED FRONTAL ASSAULT AGAINST THE GULF STATES, REALIZING ALL TOO WELL WHAT THE CONSEQUENCES WOULD BE. RATHER, THEY CAN BE EXPECTED TO CONTINUE TO SEEK SUBVERSIVE ASSETS THROUGHOUT THE GULF REGION WHILE PROBING PRESSURE POINTS AND PRACTICING GENERAL INTIMIDATION.

111. FINALLY, FEARS THAT THE SOVIETS WILL MAKE INROADS INTO IRAN WOULD SEEM GROSSLY EXAGGERATED. THE SOVIET UNION, NOT THE U.S., IS IRAQ'S PRINCIPAL ARMS SUPPLIER; THE ENEMY OF THE MUJAHIDIN IN AFGHANISTAN; THE BACKER OF THE TUDEH PARTY; AND THE RULERS OF 40 MILLION MUSLIMS INSIDE ITS OWN BORDERS. THE SOVIETS HAVE HARDLY RESPONDED POSITIVELY TO RECENT IRANIAN OVERTURES LARGELY BECAUSE THE IDEOLOGY OF IRAN'S RULING CLERICS PREVENTS THEM FROM MAKING THE SOVIETS A SUFFICIENTLY ATTRACTIVE OFFER TO SWITCH SIDES.-/

NEWTON